

POLICY / COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

APRIL 7, 2008

Oliver Administration Building

Present

Subcommittee: Marjorie McBride, Chair, Diana Campbell, Karen Lynch (6:18) and John Saviano

School Committee and Administration: William O'Dell, Edward Mara, Melinda Thies, Jane Correia, Cynthia Sadler and Guy Murgio

Marjorie McBride called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Diana Campbell motioned to approve the minutes to the February 4, 2008 meeting; John Saviano seconded; the motion passed by a vote of 3 to 0.

Student / Parent Handbooks

Marjorie McBride reported that meetings were held with all the principals; the goal is to align all handbooks K – 12 and to establish procedures to be followed across the District for children and families in need of medical accommodations in school. We must have clear

procedures for parents to inform the school and for the schools to disseminate the information. Attorney Henneous is researching a “medically fragile” policy. Jane Correia said we follow a protocol for reporting to the Trust.

Handbook Issues Under Discussion

Electronic Devices (Ipods and cell phones), Hoods and Hats

- **Permissible in common areas, not in classrooms**
- **In some classes, music promotes creativity and learning**
- **Hoods are a security concern because you cannot see faces**
- **We need to have rules that can be enforced**
- **High School administration spends a great deal of time enforcing these rules**
- **Some high school teachers enforce the policies, some do not—this is not acceptable**

Visible Underwear

- **All present agreed this is not acceptable under any circumstances.**

John Saviano informed the Committee that the Mt. Hope Student Council (the student leaders) has been working on these issues for three to four months and feel that, as a democracy, they should have input. Melinda Thies said the adults have to come to a consensus before inviting the students in. John reported that Barrington recently allowed students to wear hats and hoods after polling the

students and faculty; the faculty was split, most felt their classroom was their domain. John believes that our teachers would feel there is a time and place in the school for these types of things; he feels we have a generation gap. Marj McBride disagrees; she said Middletown allows none of these things. John said we should at least respond to their feelings. Marjorie McBride said it is Administration's job to make sure these kinds of things are covered.

Bill O'Dell believes that on one hand, the students being in school is more important than hats off, but on the other hand, teaching courtesy, manners and respect is part of the educational process.

Guy Murgo feels the Student Council should come before the SIT Team and let them make the judgment; these issues do not belong in policy; we expect a great deal from the kids, rigor is greater than ever and if we do not give anything, they think we are not listening. He said Mt. Hope students, in general, do not fight back, they withdraw or drop out. Privileges should be earned over the years and taken away if necessary.

Cindy Sadler agreed about the SIT Team and it is good to have parents work with administration. Marjorie McBride rebutted that the School Committee is ultimately responsible and parents go to them when there are issues. Melinda Thies agrees with Guy that schools are in the middle of these policies and it is an internal decision to make; parents are on the SIT Team and once a decision is made, it

must be communicated with the parents and then enforced. Marjorie McBride reiterated that if something gets violated, it comes to the School Committee; they need to be able to have input and agree with the decisions. Melinda said this process needs to continue with students, faculty and the administrative team.

Cindy Sadler suggested a simple, global blanket statement for the School Committee policy and more details and definition at the school level. Marjorie said this is a decision for the Policy Subcommittee; Melinda said we need to hear back from administration. Bill O'Dell feels that why you decide what you do, is more important than what you decide and it cannot be arbitrary and capricious. Melinda said communication is a critical piece, so each School Committee member must respond.

Karen Lynch agrees with the blanket statement idea, and rules can be the same for all levels and must be enforced consistently. Marjorie will consult with Andrew Henneous on what can and cannot be put into the handbooks. John Saviano also agrees with this approach, it preserves the schools' "management rights" and leaves decisions up to them based upon their experiences. Marjorie McBride reiterated, "The buck stops here." Diana Campbell agrees with a broad statement, but with qualifiers such as "schools enforce a dress code that teaches self respect and manners."

Kickemuit's deadline for handbooks is soon; Mt. Hope's is in June. A

final draft will be needed for the June 9th Workshop; the Policy Subcommittee will finalize them at their June 2nd meeting. Diana Campbell finds the KMS handbook patronizing and disrespectful; formatting will be addressed in the revisions.

Smoking Rules

Guy Murgo asked the Subcommittee to revisit the consequences in Policy JFCH for smoking—currently, for the 1st offense, 1 day ISS; 2nd offense, 5 days OSS; and 3rd offense, 10 days OSS. They really want the students IN school. Guy will discuss other options with the Deans (perhaps 1, 3 and 5 days ISS) and return to the Subcommittee. Marjorie McBride feels the Saturday Academy idea needs some thought.

Requisite Grades for Extra-Curricular Participation

Marjorie McBride stated we must reassess and align our requirements on both the middle and high school levels and reach a happy medium for students, State requirements and District requirements, with the goal of graduating the students in four years.

Kickemuit has a two-week window when students who receive below a C- can work to improve their grade and continue to practice with the team.

Mt. Hope students must be passing four classes. The Handbook Committee recommends interventions to assist struggling students

as well as discussion with the SIT Team.

Marjorie McBride is adamant that students should not be allowed to fail any courses and participate in sports and that we provide extra help sessions.

Melinda Thies researched the policies of our neighboring communities:

- Portsmouth: Students must maintain at least a D in every course; failing students go on principal's academic probation and tutoring, cannot play for two weeks, then are monitored.
- Barrington: Allows one failure, two failures put students on probation.
- Middletown: Students must maintain a C- average.

Marj's concerns: we need to be teaching the students that it is critical to work as a team, and, is it socially acceptable for our kids to fail?

Comments:

- John Saviano—Do not “dumb things down” but Ds are OK; give it to the SIT Teams for feedback.
- Diana Campbell – No failures; the coach is an important person, especially in families where parents are uninvolved; probation is the best method with programs in place for help; promote the attitude that it is cool to get good grades.

• **Guy Murgo** feels the no failures rule will stem an outcry from the school community and the morale of the student body will be seriously affected; this rule will affect approximately 26% of the student athletes. He recommends that the policy go before the SIT Team; also, that each coach and advisor come up with interventions for that activity which must be approved by high school administration; they recommend intervention rather than removal. They also have a social suspension component and some help programs are already in place.

• **Bill O'Dell** – We should not underestimate the influence of coaches on students; sometimes getting on the field and banging heads is what the students need.

• **Marjorie McBride** – It is our job to make sure children pass and graduate; the team supports each other; the students must rise to the occasion; there are consequences for not doing better; adamant that no failures are acceptable.

• **Guy Murgo** – The dropouts usually do not feel connected to the school.

• **Karen Lynch** – Would parents get more involved if failures are not acceptable?

• **Guy Murgo** – This would not make any difference.

• **Melinda Thies** – MASH and PBGR programs are grant-funded and are both busy; we cannot have two separate sets of rules; there will be growing pains in the first year.

• **Guy Murgo** – Despite all types of interventions and supports, there are some students who struggle tremendously, for various reasons;

failing grades are not necessarily a sign of a failing student; with no study periods, digital portfolio and very few weak courses, the academic climate is quite rigorous.

- Diana Campbell – Perhaps tie it to the GPA.
- John Saviano – Have the high school discuss the issue and return to the Committee for a final decision.
- Jane Correia – We have to be open minded but we have to stress academics; failures are not acceptable.
- Melinda Thies – Prefers a Portsmouth-type model.

Cindy Sadler will research and report the number of KMS students who would be ineligible because of grades.

Guy Murgo and Cindy Sadler left the meeting at 8:15 PM.

Marjorie McBride restated the goal is consistency across the continuum; SIT Teams cannot operate in a vacuum; we need to hear more from the administration about where we are going especially about the things that have consequences which involve the School Committee.

Speak Out / Inappropriately Dressed Student Teacher

Melinda Thies will investigate.

Graduation Requirements – Policy IKF

Melinda Thies will change the Carnegie Units to the appropriate numbers.

Bill O'Dell left the meeting at 8:20 PM.

Policy Dissemination – Policy BFD

Add “on line.”

Student Safety – Section JHF

We have only one policy under this section—Student Automobile Use. Diana Campbell would like a notation for seatbelt use.

Karen Lynch said we need a definitive, clearly explained policy for parents and staff on medical notes brought into school for students.

Sex Offender Notifications: This is a legal issue; notifications are forwarded to building administrators who decide what to do depending on the level of the offence. Parents are told where to find the information. Andrew Henneous will be consulted.

Further consideration will wait until Attorney Henneous is finished with his research and recommendations.

Next Meeting

May 5, 6:00 PM at Oliver.

Adjournment

At 8:40 PM, Diana Campbell motioned to adjourn; Marjorie McBride seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

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